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20 April 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation with Representative Charles Bennett (D., Fla.)
Re Allegations of Agency Assassination

1. In line with the Director's instructions, I met with Representative Bennett today in response to his letter to the Director of 6 April 1971 requesting reassurance that the Agency is not involved in assassination activity and urging that allegations that we are be publicly denied.

2. Mr. Bennett began our conversation with a lengthy dissertation including the following points:

a. In the past he had been confident that the Agency had not been involved in assassination activity, but now he was beginning to wonder.

b. Whether true or not, allegations in the press and elsewhere that we are are believed by "99%" of the American people, or at least 99% of his constituents.

c. These allegations, and this suspicion, is an intolerable blot not only on the reputation of CIA but on the image of the U.S. Government as a whole and something must be done about it.

d. CIA is a valuable organization and ought to be protected, but if CIA activities are to give rise to these suspicions, then this is too much of a price to pay for CIA and if these suspicions cannot be dispelled CIA should be abolished.

e. If CIA won't cooperate in dispelling these suspicions, Bennett will ask the Chairman to call the Agency before the House Armed Services Committee to explain its position on the subject, and if the Agency denies involvement in assassination, then to put such denial in the public record.

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f. If necessary, Bennett is willing to call those such as Jack Anderson who have circulated these allegations and force them in public hearings to admit they cannot be substantiated.

3. I told Mr. Bennett first that I could solemnly reassure him of the Agency's ironclad policy against assassination. I recalled that the Director had testified on this matter in September 1969 before the Committee and that only this morning the Director had authorized me to reiterate this assurance. Bennett said he accepted and welcomed this assurance, but we still had the problem of clearing our image and refuting the allegations.

4. I said I appreciated his interest and the Agency fully shared his concern, but the question was what to do about it. I commented that:

a. Irresponsible rumors about assassination have always circulated about the activities of various intelligence services over the years.

b. Many of these rumors are initiated or stimulated by hostile foreign powers or internal subversive elements and there is no reason to think that any sort of denial from whatever source would succeed in stemming their continuous flow.

c. For the Director, or the Agency, to be drawn into public denial or discussion would simply serve to agitate and amplify the issue, would provide hostile interests with targets for renewed attack, and would undermine the Agency's effectiveness as a secret intelligence organization, since we can hardly expect to attract the confidence of those whose valuable covert cooperation we seek if we are to be drawn into public debate about the way we operate.

5. Mr. Bennett said he is constantly getting mail accusing the Agency of assassination and other vicious activities, and the Agency should have a public relations office to defend itself against charges of this kind. I said we tried discreetly to refute these rumors in various ways, but do not feel it becoming or practical for a professional intelligence service to be conspicuously engaged in public relations activity.


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6. Mr. Bennett reiterated he was a friend of the Agency and wanted to be helpful, but he was afraid we were blind to the fact that a lot of people, including Members of Congress like Representatives Bella Abzug and Ronald Dellums, were out to destroy us and they would do so if we didn't defend ourselves.

7. At this point, Mr. Bennett was called to the House floor, and in closing I said I appreciated his concern and would pass on his comments to the Director, but it was my personal view that the Director would not be disposed to step into the spotlight on this issue. I said there might be other ways of dealing with it that we perhaps could explore with Mr. Bennett and Chairman Hebert after I had a chance to report back to the Director.

8. Afterwards, I told Russ Blandford, House Armed Services Committee staff, of my conversation with Mr. Bennett, and he fully agreed with the view that any public statement by the Director or the Agency would not be desirable. He also agreed with my thought that as a next step we should take up the matter with Chairman Hebert and try to persuade him to calm Bennett down and perhaps work out with Bennett a low key public statement to the effect that the Committee was fully aware of all the facts and could certify that allegations about assassinations were completely unfounded.

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